Programs Branch

User Report

TWO WORKSHOPS ON THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES IN CANADA

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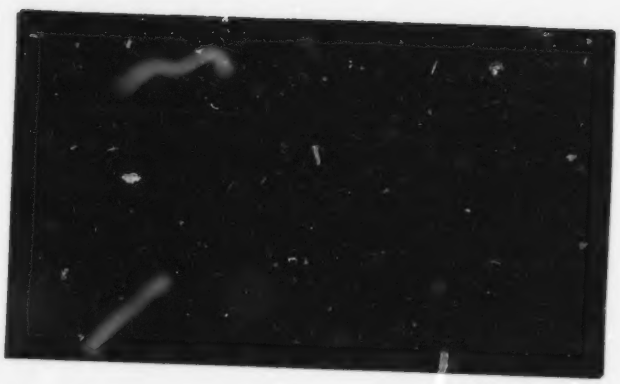

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NO. 1985-15

This working paper was prepared under contract in 1984 for the Research Division and is made available as submitted to the Ministry. The views expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

This working paper is available in French. Ce document de travail est disponible en français.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The National Monitoring of Alternative Projects	4
Self-Evaluation in Alternative Programs	16
Outcome Evaluation	22
Summary	26
Future Directions	30

Appendix

Draft Juvenile and Adult Monitoring Forms

Introduction

The Consultation Centre (Prairie Region) of the Solicitor General of Canada organized a Workshop on Monitoring and Self-Evaluation in Alternative Programs, which was held in Winnipeg, 21 to 23 of February, 1984. This meeting was a followup to a 1982 Workshop on the Evaluation of Community Alternatives in Canada, held in Kitchener, Ontario.

The 1982 Kitchener Workshop had explored the possibility of obtaining concensus from alternative program personnel, researchers, and federal government representatives on the need for evaluative data on community-based alternative projects. At that meeting, it was concluded that information on the current practices of those programs was of most interest to the main users of data on projects that offer alternatives to traditional criminal justice processes.

In addition to collecting information on current practices, the participants at the Kitchener Workshop also recommended that assistance be provided alternative programs in developing data collection procedures, perhaps in the form of a guide or manual; that data collection forms should be developed in conjunction with practitioners; and that there should be a survey to assess the "evaluation readiness" of programs in the alternatives area.

Several advances had been made since the 1982 Workshop. For example, a guide to self-evaluation for young offender projects using the "accountability

model" of program intervention was in process of being prepared. As well, a self-evaluation guide was now available for piloting in victim assistance projects, and that forthcoming experience was expected to provide valuable insights into the problems of implementing both national monitoring and self-evaluation in community-based programs. A paper entitled "a strategy for the evaluation of adult mediation centres" was also currently being prepared. Finally, two draft data collection forms (one for adult, and another for juvenile programs) had been designed for discussion at the 1984 Winnipeg Workshop. However, it was acknowledged that not all recommendations from the Kitchener Workshop had as yet been implemented.

The 1984 Winnipeg Workshop had several specific objectives in three areas of concern: the national monitoring of alternative programs, self-evaluation, and impact evaluation.

First, the Workshop participants were asked to explore the conceptual issues in, and the potential operational impediments to, the implementation of national monitoring in adult and juvenile projects. Views were elicited on the possible degree of project cooperation with requests to complete a standardized form, the feasibility of projects' utilizing a standard form as the "core" data collection instrument for internal operational purposes, and the desired contents and format of the monitoring form.

The Winnipeg Workshop also had the purpose of obtaining input from participants on the usefulness and feasibility of implementing self-evaluation in alternative

projects, and the means by which self-evaluation techniques could be incorporated into daily program operation.

Third, the Workshop participants briefly addressed the complex issues related to outcome or impact evaluations, especially the probable clients of such evaluations and the criteria to be used in selecting projects for impact assessment.

The participants in the Winnipeg Workshop were drawn from across Canada. Representation at the two day session included coordinators of alternative projects; evaluation researchers from governments, universities and private firms; and program and policy development personnel from the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

The National Monitoring of Alternative Projects

National monitoring was defined as the collection of standardized data by staff of alternative projects on the characteristics of their clients, and the nature of the interventions or services provided them. The information would be compiled into summary reports, perhaps centrally. These reports would be returned to the program at regular intervals. The other users of the monitoring information would also be able to access the data summarizing the material received from contributing projects.

The concept of national monitoring by funding agencies elicited a variety of comments on the purposes, scope and limitations of the approach. Several operational issues at the national and program levels were also identified. The attitude of the participants regarding the usefulness of the data contained in the draft monitoring forms presented for discussion at the Workshop was obtained. (See the Appendix for the monitoring forms discussed at the Workshop.)

Conceptual Issues in National Monitoring:

The reasons for national level monitoring of alternative programs were examined. It was pointed out that it is important to state the uses to which the information will be put, if the cooperation of alternative programs is to be obtained: What is going to be done with the results of the monitoring exercise?

From the federal perspective, two purposes of national monitoring are to maintain the accountability of federally funded projects, and to develop policy and program initiatives based on empirical data regarding actual practices. In addition, it is hoped that the programs themselves will benefit from monitoring: Projects could incorporate the standardized form into their information systems, as the "core" instrument by which client and program information could be collected. This information could be used to assist operational decision-making.

The scope of national monitoring was another concern: Will it be possible to collect information from non-federally funded projects? Because of the large number of government agencies involved in funding alternative projects, there may be problems in obtaining complete coverage of all programs. One federal researcher noted that there are few federal projects in the adult alternatives area, and that it may be possible to obtain the participation of non-federal projects by offering them a service -- such as printed forms useful for their own information system, and summary reports of their own data.

In the juvenile area, information systems to be developed for the Young Offenders Act may in some provinces include "alternative measures". It is unsure to what extent these programs will be run by the provinces or by voluntary agencies -- and if the provinces would request monitoring data from the latter. As part of the initiatives associated with the Young Offenders Act, the Ministry of the Solicitor General has created a "transitional support fund" to develop innovative service programs for

young offenders. All service delivery programs to which the Ministry will contribute under the transitional scheme will be asked to supply monitoring data to the Ministry.

The limitations of case-based (i.e., client oriented) monitoring forms were discussed in some detail. This format does not capture data on facilitative program activities which are unrelated to the individual client (such as public relations, volunteer recruitment and training), and which often vary greatly across projects. In addition, the community context within which a program develops is often crucial in accounting for operational effectiveness and longevity. Information on the environment in which the program functions, including the degree to which the program has "sunk roots" into the community and the system with which it works, would be valuable for the replication of alternative projects. Such qualitative data on the organizational context is not available from a case-based format. Descriptions of implementation problems can often explain operational malfunctioning, explanations that are not provided by monitoring client flow and characteristics.

Several program representatives believed that the case-based monitoring form, with its emphasis on the clients who received full program services, does not measure the broader category of services offered by some projects -- for example, providing information and problem solving in response to public inquiries and self-referrals. These staff activities may be essential components of alternative projects, even though they do not necessarily

result in new clients being accepted by the project. The delivery of such services is time consuming, and as a consequence should be monitored by some means.

Another area in which the national monitoring instrument would be of limited utility is in the provision of data on frequently asked questions such as "what proportion of court cases were referred to the project?" and "what were the relative costs and outcomes of court and alternative processes?" This information necessitates the more lengthy and sophisticated data collection techniques of outcome evaluation. Notwithstanding this, the national monitoring forms should be constructed with the goal of external evaluation in mind. They should be designed with a view to providing baseline data on the characteristics of program clientele and the services they received, to enable future assessment of the type of cases most appropriate to alternative programming.

The applicability of a single monitoring form to all types of alternative projects was of concern to Workshop participants. Although some information needs are common across all projects, there are substantial differences, depending on the characteristics of the clientele, the events precipitating program involvement, and the services offered. In addition, data elements oriented to criminal justice procedures are often inappropriate for alternative projects which operate at some distance from the system -- conflict mediation projects being a prominent example; in these projects, the Criminal Code offence categories may be extraneous to the real conflicts

between the disputing parties. Thus, the degree of proximity of the project to the formal criminal justice system affects the data elements contained in a project-relevant monitoring form.

Although the dichotomy between offender- and offence-based projects is not always clear in practice (for juvenile compensatory programs sometimes offer counselling and referrals to social service agencies as part of their intervention strategy), the discussion at the Workshop focussed on the information needs of alternative projects whose primary orientation was to the offence, rather than to the offender. It was acknowledged that a different set of information elements was required by programs which place more emphasis on client treatment than on the offence initiating the referral.

Operational Issues in National Monitoring:

There are other practical problems that must be resolved before standardized data can be obtained from alternative projects. Additional resources at the federal level will be required for data processing and quality control. If monitoring is to be of some value to program staff and to other users, the national level data must be processed, summarized and quickly fed back to the audience for the information. National monitoring presumes the introduction of systems to facilitate this quick turnaround. Furthermore, some mechanism is needed to monitor the quality of the data sent in by the projects, so that across-project comparability of information can be maintained.

At present, the research arm of the Solicitor General of Canada does not have the resources to coordinate quality control efforts, or to compile and analyze the information to be obtained through monitoring. One alternative would be to build into the budget of each participating program the costs of aggregating their own data; already compiled data could be provided to the Ministry. Microcomputers were mentioned as a possible mechanism by which projects could compile their own information. If positions of "regional evaluation officers" were created in the federal government, these staff could play a role in overseeing the consistency of coding by project personnel and could also undertake a regional analysis of the monitoring data.

From the perspective of program staff, there are a number of operational issues raised by the notion of national monitoring. Among the most important is related to the willingness of project staff to collect the information, and to routinely complete a standardized form. Programs are usually pre-occupied with the demands of internal project managment -- the practical problems of running a program. Staff cooperation may be difficult to maintain over the three year life of a demonstration project. One suggestion by a project coordinator was to incorporate a monthly bonus into project funding in order to sustain the enthusiasm for monitoring; projects would obtain this bonus only by providing regular monitoring data to the central agency. It was recognized, however, that this proposal may be difficult to implement administratively.

Another view was that there is an inverse relationship between the information available that might be useful to all parties, and the project's motivation to provide that information. During the demonstration phase of a project, the staff may be highly motivated to monitor, because it means the continuation of the project. After the demonstration period has ended, when the project has secured local or provincial funding, the need for -- and the degree of interest in -- monitoring naturally diminishes.* The more that data collection for the purposes of monitoring and future evaluation can be integrated into the project's operational need for information, the more likely project staff are to cooperate with requests to complete a standardized monitoring form.

This concern leads to a discussion of the extent to which the case-based monitoring form could also serve as the "core" instrument, used by programs as their basic form for client background and intervention data. A program coordinator found the examples of monitoring forms available at the Workshop inadequate for day-to-day case management needs. The information needed for this purpose centres on caseflow:

- Is the program responding to all cases referred to it in a timely fashion?
- What is the daily status of each ongoing case (e.g., awaiting mediation meeting)?
- Who are the significant other persons involved in the case (advocate, lawyer, relatives)?

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*This could result in a situation in which there would be scanty information available on "successful" projects (defined as those which outlive the demonstration phase), and a good deal of data on projects which did not obtain local funding.

The first two questions suggest the need to record dates, planned and actual, of the major points in the intervention process. Although some dates were included on the draft monitoring forms (see the Appendix), the case management information was not available at a glance. The third question requires the names and addresses of the parties concerned -- data elements which are irrelevant in a national monitoring form.

Program staff want easily accessible information on caseflow, so that they can monitor the progress of each client. However, it was acknowledged by most program representatives present at the Workshop that it is also desirable to have basic data on clients and the services they received.* The integration into one form of the two types of information -- caseflow and case-based descriptive data -- was seen as potentially useful, but somewhat problematic.

The source of some categories of information on the draft forms was of concern to several participants with experience at the project level. Staff may resist asking clients for social information (e.g., age, education and income) because of the perceived intrusiveness of such queries. (However, one researcher pointed out that client-staff relationships would not be impeded if these questions were asked after rapport had been developed, or after program completion.)

Furthermore, many clients will be unable to supply program staff with detailed information on prior record and the offences in the current referral.

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*See below, "The Contents of a National Monitoring Form".

This indicates the need for the program to have access to local police or court records. Unless there is a formal mechanism created to provide this information, or good informal links with local justice agencies exist, programs may not be able to supply complete details of prior and current offences on the national monitoring form.

Implementation difficulties may also arise because of the ambiguity of some events. For example, even such an apparently clear cut data element as "date of referral to alternative project" may be difficult to define: Does an informal conversation with a referral source about the suitability of a prospective client constitute a referral? Similarly, what about rejections made in informal circumstances, are they to be included in statistics as a rejection? This ambiguity may make it difficult to ensure across-project uniformity in interpretation of the data requested.

One method by which inter-program consistency of data collection may be encouraged is by the development of a coding manual, which would provide definitions of terms and instructions on the interpretation of each item on the standard form. However, some doubted if a coding manual is sufficient to obtain comparable data. Nor does the existence of a coding guide guarantee that it will be followed by project staff.

The Contents of a National Monitoring Form:

A list of data elements, common to both preliminary monitoring forms created for the Workshop, was drawn up and became the focus of small group discussions to determine their value to program staff, funding agencies and researchers. The list was divided into several major headings: client characteristics, referral data, victim information, program interventions, case management data, and outcomes.

Although the Workshop participants differed in their acceptance of the specific items included under these headings, there was a core of information which all agreed should be routinely kept -- either in response to questions that are frequently raised, or to meet immediate program management needs.

Views on the value of specific items were sometimes related to the participant's professional affiliation. Workshop participants associated with operating programs were less likely to regard demographic and social data as being useful. Program staff indicated that there were few immediate benefits to the program of collecting such information, although in the long run it might assist in the determination of the kinds of clients most suitable for program intervention.

The prior record of the client was seen by most participants as desirable information to collect, but data availability will be limited for some programs. As noted above, programs may not have access to police or court records. For program purposes there is need to know the overall degree of

prior legal involvement, but little need to collect the details of the client's diversion or court history.

Referral and victim information were believed to be important data elements to collect. The volume and type of offences in the referral (or the referral problem), reasons for rejecting a referral, the referral source, the type of victim, the amount of loss to the victim, and the nature of the relationship between the offender and the victim were all considered essential data by most participants.

It was agreed that information on the type and number of internal and external program services offered to the client should be routinely collected. Included in this category are the method by which the agreement was reached, the result of the mediation meeting (if applicable), and the type of compensation employed.

The short term outcome of the case -- that is, whether the agreement was completed satisfactorily and, if not, why not -- was viewed as indispensable information. The circumstances of, and the reasons for, non-completion of compensatory agreements in juvenile programs are especially important as a result of provisions found in the Young Offenders Act; some projects may be obliged to refer project failures to the youth court.

Case management information was regarded as necessary for projects to collect, perhaps more for daily operations than for purposes of national monitoring.

Included in this category of information are the names of the persons involved in the case, the dates of key events (both planned and actual), and the nature and length of contacts with the client.

Perceptual data on the response of the program's clients to the intervention was seen as potentially useful information, although the method of collecting this type of data was seen as requiring further examination.

It appeared to be unanimously accepted that post-program data on recidivism could not be obtained by program personnel. Even though recidivism is one of the questions most frequently asked about alternative projects, it is difficult, if not impossible, for programs to obtain empirical data on post-program police and court referrals. In addition, there are serious risks in reporting this type of information without appropriate controls.

The discussion on the monitoring form revealed that there was a close relationship between monitoring cases and case flow, and the concept of self-evaluation. The latter implies both systematization of record keeping (although not necessarily the standardization required by national monitoring) and an orientation towards using the information collected for management decisions.

Self-Evaluation in Alternative Programs

The participants at the Workshop were asked to explore the purposes, the feasibility, and the practical impediments to self-evaluation by alternative projects. Because of the scale and the time needed to complete external evaluations, they are usually unable to provide rapid feedback to program personnel. Although offering little methodological rigour, self-evaluation permits the rapid turnaround of information that is required by managers for their daily decision-making.

The Purposes of Self-Evaluation:

Self-evaluation was defined as a tool for management ("an evaluation by yourself, for yourself"). It is the means by which program staff can themselves collect information and analyze it in order to make operational improvements. The information would assist project coordinators in allocating program resources. For example, the project could assess the value of a public relations effort made to gain more volunteers: How much staff effort was needed to obtain how many new volunteers?

Furthermore, communication among projects could be enhanced if the program descriptions and monitoring data generated by the self-evaluation process were disseminated to alternative projects with similar objectives and strategies. New projects could use this information in project development and in establishing management procedures.

At the same time, self-evaluation is potentially useful in the project's dealings with current and prospective funding agencies. Projects could demonstrate the range of activities they undertake more adequately than at present. If there was a self-evaluation/monitoring component to their operations, projects would be better able to demonstrate that funds have been wisely spent. In this area, there is a conjunction of needs in both projects and the funding agencies: Self-evaluation not only assists projects in justifying their existence, but is also the mechanism by which the accountability required by the funding agency can be achieved.

The proposed national monitoring form is intended to be one component of the self-evaluation package developed for young offender programs. Federal representatives expressed the hope that the implementation of self-evaluation techniques would permit the routinization and standardization of information systems, thereby enabling the federal government to obtain national level data on the clients of alternative projects. It was also noted, however, that some flexibility has to be maintained because of the variations among alternative projects.

Operational Problems in Self-Evaluation:

There are several operational problems in implementing self-evaluation. Not surprisingly, these stumbling blocks are similar to those discussed on national monitoring: staff willingness to participate, the costs involved, data quality, and the method selected to collect the self-evaluation information.

Several participants maintained that self-evaluation should be built into a program from its inception. Ongoing projects would tend to resist the changes implied by self-evaluation and/or would find it difficult to integrate self-evaluation techniques into their established management style.

Others believed that some aspects of self-evaluation would be welcomed, particularly the management information used on a daily or weekly basis. More problematic is the longer term analysis envisioned by some present, in which the self-evaluation data are used to review, and perhaps to revise, program objectives and strategies. Project managers are more likely to accept the immediate, operational benefits of the management information systems developed for self-evaluation, than they are to perceive the advantages for long range planning. While there may be ways of convincing programs that there are long term benefits, it was believed that outside assistance would be required. Project directors often lack managerial training and experience. There was some skepticism expressed whether "how to" guides to self-evaluation, and workshops on the topic, would be sufficient to provide staff with the skills required to gauge the achievement of operational objectives.

One participant questioned whether information collected for internal program purposes could also be used in national policy formulation and planning. Variability in record keeping may mean that the information is not consistent across projects, thus making comparisons invalid. While the data collected

by self-evaluation methods may be meaningful to the individual project, it may be of questionable validity for use outside of the program. Even if there was no requirement to report externally (i.e., no national monitoring scheme), it is inevitable that the information would be used in funding submissions and other efforts to justify the program.

The cost to the project is clearly an obstacle to self-evaluation, for time and resources are required to collect and analyze the information collected. Who would undertake the data collection and would it be periodic, or continuous?

A variety of methods were suggested to collect the management information used in self-evaluation. University students could be used to abstract data from project files, but this approach entails a periodic, rather than an ongoing form of self-evaluation. Would periodic aggregation of program data be adequate when self-evaluation is primarily a management aid? If project managers and their staff are expected to collect and analyze the data, then these functions should be part of their job description, and personnel selected with that capability. Volunteers could perform the data collection, but turnover and motivation might preclude their use. Microcomputer technology could perhaps be adapted to the needs of alternative projects, thus easing the tasks of compiling the data at the program level.

A Self-Evaluation Package for Victim Assistance Projects:

An example of a self-evaluation package was introduced at the Workshop. The "Self-Evaluation Guide for Victim Assistance Projects" was designed for use by staff in police-based service projects. In addition to a brief outline of the definition and purposes of self-evaluation, the Guide contains a grid for a detailed narrative description of the project to be completed annually, forms for collecting case data, a monthly summary form of other project activities (e.g., training of volunteers, public relations efforts), and instructions on linking the data collected with the objectives of the project.

The Guide was in draft form, and was to be piloted in three victim assistance projects. Once finalized, it is planned that the participating projects will provide the federal funding agency with a copy of the case form; the Statistics Division of the Solicitor General of Canada will computerize the data and supply summary statistics to the projects every three or six months. Included in the feedback to the projects will be the narrative descriptions of all projects participating in self-evaluation.

It was emphasized that the experience during the development of the Guide for victim projects has shown that there is a need for this type of management aid, but the package must be as concise as possible. Program staff do care about the amount of paper that accumulates in case files.

The session on self-evaluation concluded that there was considerable agreement that self-evaluation is necessary and possible, but there is a need for flexibility in implementation.

Outcome Evaluation

A brief session on outcome evaluation was included on the Workshop agenda in order to develop the topics of interest to program personnel and researchers, so that further "agenda setting" could be undertaken by representatives of the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

The Difference between Self-Evaluation and Outcome Evaluation:

Although potentially providing necessary management and monitoring information, self-evaluations are not able to assess long term outcomes or the impact of the project's intervention strategies on the clients and the criminal justice system. Self-evaluations are internally executed assessment of program "process". Project staff have neither the resources, nor (usually) the expertise to undertake the methodology required by an outcome evaluation. The purposes of the two forms of evaluation therefore differ, as to the assumptions and the ways in which the data are used -- although there may be an overlap between the two in the data that are collected.

Who Are the Clients of Outcome Evaluations?

Some program personnel want to know if their programs are providing good service at acceptable cost, and to obtain data on the recidivism of their clientele. Even though the clients of outcome evaluations do include program personnel, the discussion suggested that, to some present, the primary clients of outcome evaluations are external to the project. It was apparent that personal experience with unsuccessful evaluations (defined

as those which did not answer the questions of project staff) partly accounted for the absence of enthusiasm. The staff time required, and the tension that sometimes occurred between evaluator and staff, caused some program personnel to doubt if the process had been worthwhile. In practice, for a variety of reasons, including insufficient funds allocated to the evaluations, research has not provided results that meet the information needs of the staff of alternative projects.

In addition, several representatives of alternative programs mentioned that, in the past, the Ministry did not clearly define the purposes of the evaluations it has funded. The research questions should be specified at the beginning of the project, and the evaluation integrated into project operations from inception.

A related issue is the determination of the objectives to be evaluated. Funding agencies usually want data on the cost savings to the justice system. Project objectives may include cost reduction as an objective but, as one federal government researcher pointed out, written project objectives tend to be a mixture of what the funding agency wants to hear, and what the organizers believe they can achieve.

Furthermore, alternative projects often have unstated objectives (such as turning control of crime over to the community) that motivate the activities of staff. Whether these "hidden agendas" should be dealt with by the evaluation was recognized as an issue deserving future discussion.

The Selection of Projects for Outcome Evaluation:

Several present at the Workshop emphasized that coordination and foresight are required when the decision to evaluate is being made. The funding agency must be more precise in its expectations for outcome evaluations, and in its reasons for selecting projects for rigorous evaluation. The criteria for the selection of programs to undergo sophisticated outcome evaluations engendered some controversy.

One project representative suggested that outcome evaluations should be performed when a new idea is to be tested. It does not make much sense to test the same idea over and over again, especially when the costs of an outcome evaluation are often equivalent to the operating budget of the project being evaluated.

A researcher expanded on this point, suggesting that the question of project selection is allied to the question of the objectives to be assessed. Some projects are established to assess the effectiveness of an innovative intervention strategy. For these programs it is reasonable for the funding agency to specify the objectives to be evaluated by the research. From this perspective, it is not necessary to do impact evaluations on operational programs. Impact evaluations should only be done when there is the need to show that the strategy is an effective one. To undertake an outcome evaluation, the project and its services have to be secondary to the research design, because of the constraints placed on program activities by the evaluation. Few operating projects will consent to

participate in experiments (for example, random assignment of clients to treatment and control groups), because staff are primarily oriented to providing service, and research takes second place. Thus, on both theoretical and pragmatic grounds, outcome evaluations should be confined to experimental or model projects.

A federal government researcher expressed a slightly different opinion. Ideally, a restricted number of projects that address the concerns of the funding agency should be selected for evaluation. At the same time, a core of data elements could also be collected by all programs in the same area. This core information could be used to compare the projects which have been evaluated with those that have not, in the hope of discovering to what extent the evaluation findings might apply to other projects. There is, then, in this researcher's view an interrelationship between monitoring/self-evaluation and outcome evaluations: Systematic national level data are required for comparison with fully evaluated programs.

However, it was acknowledged that there are at present a number of problems in the methodology of evaluation research. The literature is full of disagreements as to the correct methods and the most appropriate research designs. There is also a problem in locating evaluators with the political, interpersonal and other skills needed to complete an outcome evaluation successfully. Because there is no certainty regarding the quality of the product, projects which agree to an outcome evaluation are taking a risk. Not only are many alternative projects "experimental", so too are the evaluation techniques used to assess them.

Summary

The Winnipeg Workshop on Monitoring and Self-Evaluation in Alternative Programs made considerable progress in achieving concensus on the issues surrounding the collection of national level data from alternative projects, the general contents of the monitoring instrument, and the need for quality control and timely feedback of compiled data to the users of the information.

There was agreement that several categories of information (e.g., referral data, victim characteristics, interventions, and completion rates) could, and should, be collected routinely by all alternative projects.

Methods of tracking case flow through the main decision points of the program and other staff and client acivity was considered by many participants to be the most crucial program-relevant information to collect.

Less agreement was evident on other elements in the draft monitoring forms discussed at the Workshop. Some information (e.g., sociodemographic characteristics of clients) was seen as intrusive and extraneous to daily operation. Other information (such as prior record) was perceived as difficult for most projects to obtain with any degree of accuracy.

Several participants noted that the recidivism of program clientele was the question that is most frequently asked of alternative programs. But it was acknowledged that, in most cases, such information was beyond the

resources of programs to collect, and perhaps potentially harmful to programs if reported without appropriate controls.

The format and contents of a national monitoring form depend to some extent on the nature of the alternative project. Although one form could not meet the needs of all types of projects (e.g., those with differing strategies, types of clientele, and proximity to the justice system), it should be possible to devise a common set of items suitable to various categories of projects. This common group of items would facilitate across-project comparisons required for program and policy development purposes.

Many projects already record a good deal of information about their clients and program activities. All programs should be encouraged to collect as much information as possible without jeopardizing the other tasks necessary to operate a project successfully.

Another approach to the collection of information on alternative projects is the project description, which would provide details on the organizational structure, target population, use of volunteers, environment, etc. of the program. As a qualitative description of program operations, the project description could offer valuable insights not achieved by the case-based format currently envisaged in national monitoring.

The discussions on national monitoring and self-evaluation methods also generated concerns as to the costs of implementation at the program level. Programs will have to include in their budget the staff to complete monitoring forms and to fulfill the requirements of self-evaluation. The use of microcomputer technology was mentioned as a possible means of compiling information, thereby reducing staff time in data manipulation.

It was recognized that some projects (particularly those just starting operations) may require assistance in designing an information system. The dissemination of examples of such systems to programs in the planning stages would be appreciated. Guides or manuals on self-evaluation techniques were regarded as most appropriate for new programs that had not yet developed their own methods of record keeping.

The Workshop participants discussed in some depth the "political" issue of gaining the cooperation of alternative projects. Clearly, if participation in national monitoring and self-evaluation is to occur in all alternative projects, including those past the federally funded demonstration phase, project staff must believe that they are receiving something in return for their efforts. One means of generating enthusiasm and interest is to involve program personnel in the design and testing of data collection instruments and self-evaluation guides. The provision of summary reports, which feed back to the participating projects the compiled data provided to the federal government, is also essential if cooperation is to be maintained. It was suggested that a monetary incentive would assist in achieving cooperation, but the feasibility of this form of encouragement was in some doubt.

The discussion on impact evaluation revealed some disagreement as to when such sophisticated assessments should be undertaken -- should only experimental or model programs be evaluated, or were outcome evaluations also appropriate for a broader range of programs? Program personnel with experience with evaluations expressed dissatisfaction with the results of the research they had been involved in. It was pointed out that the federal government should specify its interests before funding costly impact evaluations.

Future Directions

The next steps with regard to program evaluation and monitoring are clearly the responsibility of the federal government. Federal government personnel should define their objectives for evaluation research in general -- and specifically for costly impact evaluations. If there were more precision in the goals and rationales for undertaking evaluations of various types, it should be possible to define more clearly the information that is required from alternative programs, as well as the methodologies to be employed in obtaining that information. To this end, the Ministry of the Solicitor General is giving consideration to holding a workshop of evaluation researchers in order to discuss the objectives for, and methods of, assessing community-based projects in the alternatives area.

In addition, the federal government also has the responsibility for developing the mechanisms that are required to ensure good quality data from national monitoring, and to prepare reports that are both useful and timely for the clients of national monitoring information.

Second drafts of the adult and juvenile monitoring forms will be produced as a result of the input received from Workshop participants; these must be pre-tested and additional revisions will almost certainly be required before their implementation. The self-evaluation guide for programs for young offenders will also be prepared in draft form, and further consultation with program personnel is necessary before it can be piloted in operating projects.

APPENDIX:

DRAFT JUVENILE AND ADULT MONITORING FORMS

A CASE-BASED MONITORING FORM FOR PRE- AND POST-COURT ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS FOR JUVENILES

Unless otherwise instructed, circle one answer to each item; e.g., (1.) Male
If answer not known, write "DK" beside item.

Juvenile Characteristics

1. Sex: 1. Male 2. Female

2. Age at date of first offence in this referral: ___ ___

3. Race: 1. Status Indian 2. Metis 3. Other

4. Living arrangements at date of offence:
   1. With parent(s)
   2. With other relatives
   3. Foster/group home
   4. Other SPECIFY: _____

5. School/employment status:
   1. Attending school
   2. Employed full-time
   3. Other SPECIFY: _____

6. Prior record: COMPLETE ALL THAT APPLY.

   1. No prior record
   2. Prior referrals to diversion No.: ___ Date of last diversion: _____
   3. Prior referrals to court No.: ___ Date of last referral: _____
   4. Prior convictions No. of charges: ___ Date of last conviction: _____

7. IF ITEM 6 ANSWERED 2 TO 4: Type of offence of 2 most recent charges:
   (a)_____ (b)_____

Referral Data

8. Number of co-accused: ___

9. IF ITEM 8 ANSWERED 1 OR MORE: Number of co-accused also referred to program: ___

0. Number of charges in this referral: ____

OR EACH CHARGE, COMPLETE (a) TO (e). USE OFFENCE AND VICTIM CODES ON ATTACHED LIST.

	Offence Type	$ Value of Property Stolen/Damaged	Type of Victim	Date of Offence	IF SENTENCING OPTION: Date of Disposition
1.	(a)_____	(b)_____	(c)_____	(d)_____	(e)_____
2.	(a)_____	(b)_____	(c)_____	(d)_____	(e)_____
3.	(a)_____	(b)_____	(c)_____	(d)_____	(e)_____

4. Date of referral to program: _____

5. Referral source:
   1. Police
   2. Private security
   3. Crown -- pre-charge
   4. Crown -- post-charge
   5. Court -- prior to adjudication
   6. Court -- sentencing option
   7. Probation
   8. Other SPECIFY: _____

6. Date of first program contact with juvenile: _____

OR PRE-COURT REFERRALS ONLY.

7. Did the juvenile consult legal counsel? 1. Yes 2. No

8. Result of first contact with juvenile/parent:
   1. Juvenile accepted program
   2. Juvenile/parent refused program
   3. Juvenile could not be contacted
   4. Other SPECIFY: _____

19. IF ITEM 18 ANSWERED 2: Reasons for refusal: COMPLETE ALL THAT APPLY.
   1. Preferred to go to court
   2. Denied guilt/responsibility for offence(s)
   3. On advice of legal counsel
   4. Other SPECIFY: _____

Program Data

0. Did juvenile and victim have a pre-existing relationship? 1. Yes 2. No

21. IF YES: What was the relationship?
   1. Relative
   2. Neighbour
   3. Store-customer
   4. Other SPECIFY: _____

2. Was there any (post-offence) juvenile-victim contact? 1. Yes 2. No

23. IF YES: Where?
   1. At mediation/panel meeting (i.e., during process of developing agreemer
   2. During completion of agreement
   3. Other contact SPECIFY: _____

1. Nature of program staff contact with the victim: COMPLETE ALL THAT APPLY.
   1. None
   2. To ascertain value of loss or damage
   3. To discover wishes regarding compensatory agreement
   4. To inform victim of outcome of agreement
   5. To arrange attendance at mediation/panel meeting
   6. Other SPECIFY: _____

5. What type of compensation was employed? COMPLETE ALL THAT APPLY.
   1. Apology to victim
   2. Restitution to victim $ _____ No. of days to pay: ____
   3. Personal service to victim No. of hours: ____ No. of days to complete: ____
   4. Community service No. of hours: ____ No. of days to complete: ____
      Type of placement: _____
   5. Other SPECIFY: _____

6. Any other program intervention or service(s) provided? 1. Yes 2. No

   27. IF YES: What were they?
      1. Referral to child welfare/protection agency (e.g., CAS)
      2. Referral to drug/alcohol program
      3. Referral to psychiatric/psychological services
      4. Other referral SPECIFY: _____
      5. Other intervention/service SPECIFY: _____

   28. IF ANY REFERRALS MADE: Did client make contact with agency? 1. Yes 2. No

   29. IF ITEM 28 ANSWERED 2: Why not? SPECIFY: _____

Outcomes

3. Date of program completion: _____

1. Did youth successfully complete compensations listed in Item 25?
   1. Yes
   2. Partially
   3. No

   32. IF ITEM 31 ANSWERED 2, PARTIALLY: COMPLETE ALL THAT APPLY.
      1. Restitution $ paid: _____
      2. Personal/community service hours completed: _____
      3. Other incomplete compensation SPECIFY: _____

   33. IF ITEM 31 ANSWERED 2 OR 3: Outcome of partial or non-completion:
      1. Referred/returned to court
      2. Renegotiated agreement
         SPECIFY: _____
      3. Other SPECIFY: _____

4. Was juvenile arrested/referred to screening agency or to court on a new set of charges after date of referral to program?
   1. Yes 2. No

   35. IF YES: List the new offence(s): _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

DRAFT ADULT MONITORING FORM

FILE NO. _____

DATE OF INITIAL CONTACT _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____

AGE: _____

GENDER: 1. Male
2. Female

CURRENT MARITAL STATUS: 1. Single
2. Married/Common-Law
3. Widowed
4. Separated/Divorced

RACIAL ORIGIN:

1. White
2. Native
    1. Status
    2. Nonstatus
3. Other (e.g., Oriental, East Indian)

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL OBTAINED:

1. No formal education
2. Some public school ($\leq$ 8 years)
3. Some high school
4. Completed high school
5. Technical school
6. Technical diploma/certificate
7. University/community college
8. Undergraduate degree
9. Graduate work
10. Graduate or professional degree

LENGTH OF TIME IN COMMUNITY: _____
(years, months)

EMPLOYMENT:

1. Employed
    1. part-time
    2. full-time
2. Unemployed
3. Homemaker
4. Student

PREVIOUS HISTORY WITH CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM:

1. Yes
2. No

If yes: Number of warnings _____

Number of "diversions"_____

Number of previous charges _____

Number of court convictions_____

Date of Referral_____

SOURCE OF REFERRAL TO CURRENT PROGRAMME:

1. Citizen/community/social service agency
2. Police
3. Crown prosecutor

POINT OF INTERVENTION:

1. Alternative to charge
2. Post-charge, pre-court
3. Court level (sentencing option)

ALLEGED OFFENSE

Date of Alleged Offense:

_____

OFFENSE AGAINST PERSON:

1. Assault
2. Intimidation

OFFENSE AGAINST PROPERTY:

1. Theft under
2. Theft over
3. Attempted theft
4. Break and enter
5. Forgery, fraud, false pretenses
6. Wilful damage
7. Possession of stolen property
    1. Under $200
    2. Over $200

LIQUOR OFFENSE

1. Impaired driving

DRUG OFFENSE:

1. Simple possession
2. Trafficking

TRAFFIC OFFENSE:

1. Without a license
2. Dangerous driving
3. Failure to remain

OTHER OFFENSES

1. Indecent Acts
2. Creating a disturbance

WAS THERE A VICTIM?

1. Yes
2. No

If yes: Who was the victim?

1. Private individual(s)
2. Public institution
3. Private firm

Did victim participate in project?

1. Yes
2. No

If No, Why?_____

_____

INTERVENTION Date of Intervention_____

1. Not accepted into project. Why?_____

_____

2. No agreement reached. Why?_____

_____

3. Warning.

4. Restitution

1. Apology (written or verbal)
2. Financial to victim - Amount $_____

4. Restitution (continued)

   3. Service to victim - number of hours _____
      Brief description of duties _____

   4. Community work service - number of hours _____
      Brief description of duties _____

      _____

5. Referral to social service agency

   1. Drug education/treatment
   2. Alcohol education/treatment
   3. Motor vehicle education
   4. Individual counselling
   5. Family counselling

6. Fine option

7. Probation

8. Other _____
   (Please specify)

OUTCOMES

If agreement reached:

1. Completed Date of completion: _____

2. Not completed

   - Degree of completion: Number of hours _____

     Amount of dollars _____

   - Reasons for failure of completion:

     1. New offense
     2. Unable to locate offender
     3. Agreement not feasible
     4. Offender refused to complete
     5. Other _____
        (Please specify)

If agreement not completed (continued)

1. Return to court process
2. Renegotiate agreement

Type of intervention _____
(See previous listing)

RECIDIVISM

Contact with police? (in 12 months since initial contact)

1. Yes
2. No

If yes:

1. During intervention Date: _____
2. After intervention Date: _____

Alleged Offense(s) (using previous categories)

_____

_____

Nature of contact(s)

1. warnings - #_____
2. diversion - #_____
3. court appearance-#_____

HIGHLIGHTS

OF THE

WORKSHOP IN THE EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY ALTERNATIVES IN CANADA

JULY, 1982

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Administrative Abstract

The participants at the Workshop on the Evaluation of Community Alternatives outlined some of the major assumptions and ideological underpinnings of alternative programming in the criminal justice area. Many of these assumptions have thus far gone untested. While the issues arising from the assumptions and objectives point to the need for more program evaluations and descriptive data, there have been a number of impediments to the collection of information both on an individual project level and on a national level.

The users of information on alternative programs include the project staff, key actors in the Criminal Justice System locally, and the community; the funding agencies, in particular the Federal agencies responsible for policy development, program development and research in the alternatives area. The Workshop participants discussed the commonalities of information needs among the main "user groups". It was decided that information on the current practice in these programs -- what is being done to what type of offenders -- is most needed by the user groups. The Workshop concluded with a discussion of the possible information elements that could be obtained nationally, the means to collect national-level data, and other methods of obtaining and disseminating descriptive and evaluative information on community alternatives to the Criminal Justice System.

Background to the Workshop

The Consultation Centre of the Solicitor General of Canada has been involved for a number of years in the development and funding of programs that function as alternatives to traditional criminal justice processing. Dispute mediation (before and after police involvement), victim-offender reconciliation, pre-trial diversion, and sentencing alternatives (fine options, community service orders) have been among the types of programs encouraged by the Ministry. The developmental strategy of the Consultation Centre has been on community-based projects, which draw on volunteers and other existing community resources.

The nature and extent of program evaluations of alternative programs have varied. The Workshop on the Evaluation of Community Alternatives, held in Kitchener, Ontario, July 20 to 22, 1982, was designed to assist the Ministry of the Solicitor General in its approach towards program evaluation and the collection of national data on alternative programs. The emphasis was on data collection that would be useful to the several audiences for the information, especially program personnel and the funding agencies. The participants at the Workshop were asked to suggest methods which would facilitate the collection and dissemination of evaluative and descriptive information, and to indicate if there is the possibility of consensus regarding the type of information required by the major interest groups associated with alternative programs in the criminal justice area.

The Workshop drew together persons from different backgrounds; represented

were the public and private sector of criminal justice research and evaluation, program planners, and regional and national Consultation Centre staff.

The Fundamental Principles of Alternative Programming

In order to place the issues surrounding program evaluation in context, the Workshop participants first outlined some of the many rationales for, and assumptions underlying, the movement towards community-based alternatives in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The participants agreed that many of the fundamental principles of the System also apply to alternative programs. Minimum intervention by the State, the protection of the individual's rights and liberties, equitable treatment under the law, equal access to justice, and protection of the collective interests of society are all basic principles of the CJS -- and principles to which community alternatives also adhere.

The interest in alternative programs is a culmination of the belief that the full force of the formal System should not be invoked for some matters. Intervention by the State should be replaced, in those instances, by a more "civil law" approach, whereby intervention and reparative sanctions are not the sole responsibility of the criminal law but are societal functions which should be shared by the community. Alternative programs, although having the same overall goals as the Justice System, have established a different set of objectives and strategies from those of the CJS.

The assumptions underlying those objectives can be divided into three

categories: those directed towards the Criminal Justice System, the community and the crime victim, and the individual offender.

System-related assumptions have had two major foci; the first broadly relates to the resources of the formal process, and the second to inadequacies of the traditional System, most particularly the courts and corrections.

First, alternatives to the Criminal Justice System are seen as supplementing and enhancing the resources available to the System. Courts are restrained by legal precedent and procedure. The crux of many disputes may not be amenable to resolution by the adversarial process. The adversarial process, it is assumed, is not the most effective mechanism to provide lasting solutions to many forms of criminal and quasi-criminal behaviour.

Because of these problems, alternative projects were devised to perform activities that were never part of the mandate of the System. Community-based alternative programs provide options to local citizens that may preclude the need for individuals to turn to the formal System; conflict resolution or mediation programs are one example. In contrast to the CJS, these programs are proactive. They do not merely respond to socially disruptive or criminal behaviour, but instead actively promote social harmony by providing the community with tools to deal with conflict, and thereby reduce the need for formal intervention.

Other programs widen the range of choices available to key actors in the

CJS, especially at arrest and disposition. Pre-trial diversion and sentencing alternatives have been developed to enhance the System's functioning by providing services heretofore not available.

System reform has been viewed as another positive effect of alternative programming. Alternatives have been assumed to reduce the costs of the formal System by preventing minor cases from clogging the courts, and by providing alternatives to incarceration. They are believed to increase efficiency by allowing the courts and corrections to concentrate on the more serious violations of the law.

Second, in addition to the enhancement and reform assumptions, some alternative programmers have assumed that the CJS has not operated entirely according to the principles enumerated earlier. Some would suggest that there has been bias in the System's exercise of discretionary power, and that disadvantaged persons may not necessarily receive the "equitable treatment" that the System is supposed to provide. Alternative programs which give the accused greater opportunity to participate in the proceedings are seen as redressing some of the power imbalances found in the adversarial process. As a result of the involvement of lay personnel, there is assumed to be more public accountability than is found in the CJS. Furthermore, it is argued by some that the formal process has not adequately protected society's interests; the victim of crime is often ignored, receiving little or no recompense for damages suffered. Many alternative programs attempt to bring the victim into a more prominent role, often by allowing the victim to participate in the decision-making or bargaining process, or by ensuring that

the victim receives compensation.

There are other assumptions related to benefits to the victim and the community. Alternatives are perceived as inherently "good" -- better than the CJS because local management and control mean a less bureaucratized, more personalized process. Projects are developed by community members and are presumably attuned to the explicit needs of that community. The participants in disputes can maintain control over the problem. By encouraging the offender to take responsibility for his or her own actions, there is less loss or damage incurred by the victim.

Under these circumstances, involvement of local citizens has the effect, or so it is assumed, of increased tolerance for non-conforming behaviour, of increased responsibility on the part of lay persons for their community, of increased awareness of the citizen's role in preventing crime, and increased victim satisfaction. In the long run, there will be greater social harmony because program strategies have encouraged the reconciliation of the offender with the community. Some programs also believe that the "collective interests" of society will be met in a more effective way as a result of the lowered recidivism of program participants, and a consequent future reduction in victimization and loss.

Planners and programmers in the alternatives area have also made assumptions as to effects on the offender. Programmers often assume that there are positive attitudinal and behavioural changes among their clientele. Service provision is a strategy of some alternative programs; resources are made

available that accused offenders would not otherwise have obtained, or received later in the process. It is believed, too, that the offender will perceive the alternative as less coercive and more fair. More subtle effects postulated are the inculcation in the accused of a sense of responsibility, and a reduction in negative labelling. The offender is therefore reintegrated into the community, rather than further isolated from it -- as is believed to occur with System processing.

Issues Raised by the Assumptions Underlying Alternative Programs

The Workshop participants questioned the validity of many of these assumptions. Among the concerns expressed were the following:

- Are the proceedings less adversarial than the formal System?
- Is the program less coercive? If there continues to be a threat of court proceedings, can a mediation or pre-trial diversion program ever be truly voluntary and non-coercive?
- Is lay involvement sufficient for a program to meet requirements of public accountability? How can government agencies, System personnel, and the community be assured that the program protects the rights and liberties of accused offenders to the same degree as the formal court and correctional systems?
- Are the power imbalances seen to exist in the formal process redressed by alternative programs? Are not the same handicaps (low socio-economic status, problems in verbal expression, for example) also found in volunteer-run bargaining sessions?

- If the outcome of the program is more onerous than a court appearance would have been -- as may be the case when first offenders must compensate their victims -- will the program be able to produce attitude change, and an increased sense of fairness and justice among its participants?

- Is it more "humane" to put people through the rigors of an alternative program under those circumstances?

- Do alternative programs really provide more individualized justice by examining the circumstances surrounding the offence? During the sentencing phase, does the court not also look at the personal and social factors precipitating or underlying the offence?

- Some programs have broadened their scope by expanding their original criteria for program entry. Is there not a danger of "widening the net", that is, of involving more persons in some quasi-judicial structure, without the due process protections found in criminal and civil proceedings?

- Are alternative projects really less costly than the formal System?
  - In smaller communities, is the cost of the project infrastructure merited by the potential caseload?
  - In a diversion project, with a legal component to provide participants with legal advice before being diverted and with a counselling capacity, is it likely that the program is less expensive than the traditional System?

- How do project managers know if their efforts to educate the community are successful? It could be that the "community" has a distorted view

of the purpose of the project. Also, is it realistic to speak of public education and awareness as a prime achievement of alternative programs, when only a small proportion of the community are ever peripherally involved in the project, even in those programs which recruit many volunteers?

- Should there be guidelines for the outcome of mediation and other alternative programs? The thrust in the Criminal Justice System is towards reducing sentencing disparaties, whereas an important objective of mediation is to produce a settlement satisfactory to both parties. This can result, for instance, in one party having only to apologize to the victim in one case, while in another similar case, one of the parties has to perform forty hours of community work. Does this situation meet the assumption regarding equitable treatment? How is it any different from existing disparaties in the System?

The Need for Program Evaluation and Monitoring

These and other issues strongly indicated the need for program evaluations in the area, and replication of research across communities and across projects with similar objectives. However, traditional evaluation methods require that program operators have well developed links among the assumptions which underlie the program's goals, the specific operational objectives, and the strategies or day-to-day activities of the project. It was acknowledged by the Workshop participants that this may not always be the case.

An examination of an early set of objectives from the Kitchener Community

Mediation Service raised a number of concerns regarding the role of the evaluator. Should the evaluator take the program's statement of objectives as "givens", and only try to clarify the objectives in order to develop measures of program success? Or should the evaluator actively reformulate the objectives to point out conflicts and inconsistencies in the operating assumptions of the program? Does the evaluator have the responsibility to persuade program staff that they should be trying to achieve something other than what they have stated, or undertake different activities to achieve their objectives? And, finally, should the evaluator collect information on other issues which have not been stated as objectives (e.g., the "widening of the net" question), because such concerns are continually mentioned in the literature on alternative programs?

Some Workshop participants did argue for a more active role for program evaluators. Although program operators may develop written objectives that conform to the interests of the funding agency, the actual operating objectives, not on paper, may be much more important to staff than the formally stated ones. Thus, the need to examine latent as well as manifest objectives was mentioned, as was the importance of ascertaining if the objectives had changed over time. Nor can the evaluator assume that there is general consensus on objectives among staff and others in contact with the program, such as referral sources and CJS personnel. All these possibilities create problems for the evaluation researcher.

One Workshop member pointed out that very often diversion and other projects are mounted, not because the problem -- of, say, minor shoplifting

charges going through court -- is greater in one community than in others, but because there was a community group that decided to obtain funding and was successful in doing so. Local needs therefore have not always been the precipitating factor in program development.

These issues brought the discussion to the purpose and timing of program evaluations. Is the Federal government, by undertaking evaluation, most interested in trying to obtain a better program? Is it evaluating a concept, to establish whether that concept as originally designed has achieved what it set out to? Is evaluation sometimes used as a political weapon to "pull the plug" on projects that have clearly not succeeded?

Another Workshop participant described an approach that could be used by funding agencies before mounting large scale, costly evaluations. Programs would be encouraged to develop monitoring systems from their inception. After six or twelve months of operation, an outsider could conduct an external "program review", using the monitoring data collected by program staff, which would establish the "evaluability" of the project. At this point, it would be decided if an in-depth outcome evaluation were worthwhile.

Unfortunately, as a Federal government researcher pointed out, this approach is not always feasible. Very often evaluation is seen as essential only when initial funding for a program is running out, and the evaluation becomes a lever for obtaining secure funding. There is a last minute scramble to collect empirical data on program success. Usually there has been little

ongoing monitoring and few data elements required for the evaluation are readily available, or even retrievable from program records.

The Workshop explored other constraints which have prevented the accumulation of evidence on the effects and effectiveness of alternative programs in the criminal justice area.

A number of programs are replications of a service delivery model that has operated apparently successfully elsewhere; small scale fine option projects were offered as an example of a well tested concept that has spread. There is the general assumption that this approach to reducing rates of imprisonment is a viable solution to the problem. Under these circumstances, is it worthwhile to spend a considerable amount of money in launching an evaluation? Should a researcher be hired to collect outcome and process information, when the cost of the research may be in excess of the annual budget of the program? Even "program reviews", in which the evaluator would collect information on the evaluability of the project, are costly, when many alternative projects have budgets of less than $30,000 per year.

As well, basic data on case processing and client characteristics are not invariably collected by programs in a systematic, routinized way -- clearly an impediment to undertaking either evaluation or a program review. Most persons present at the Workshop believed that such basic monitoring information should be a priority for alternative programs. There were, however, practical

barriers to its collection listed.

Many alternative programs are one-person organizations. Standard operating procedures are seen as superfluous because one staff member delivers all services, making all referral and client contacts. Some alternative programs are managed by church or other groups which may have little experience in deciding what information to collect, and how to obtain and present it. There is no handbook or guide available to assist program efforts in record keeping. Furthermore, staff time is usually heavily committed to service delivery; record keeping may be felt to be of marginal importance in relation to other activities. Project staff may feel that some information is overly intrusive; staff sometimes believe that basic demographic data, such as age and occupation, are irrelevant to program operation and, by asking clients for it, liable to alienate participants.

It became apparent that most of these issues could not be resolved unless the Workshop addressed two critical questions: who needs what type of information, and to what purpose would each user category put the information?

The Audience for Standardized Data on Alternative Programs

It seemed reasonable to assume that, although the priorities of major interest groups may differ, as may the degree of interest in empirical data, there were some common information needs among those involved with alternatives programming in criminal justice. The Workshop participants

explored the commonalities of needs and raised some problems they believed significant.

Three main categories of users of information were listed:

- the staff of the program and those with whom they associate, such as System personnel and community members;
- Federal government personnel, such as criminal justice policy makers, planners, and researchers -- those responsible for research, program and policy development, and funding in the Ministries of Justice and the Solicitor General;
- a heterogeneous category, which includes the academic research community, and potential funding agencies.

These "clients" for information require data for a variety of purposes. Only when there is an awareness of why each audience might need the information can there be decisions regarding the most suitable form for evaluation, the role of the researcher, and the types of national-level data that can reasonably be expected to emerge from the alternatives area.

From the perspective of Workshop participants, project staff require information which helps them to make improvements; which assists operators in their decisions about staff activities and in making "mid-course corrections" in the program's strategies; information which helps clarify the contributing factors to program effectiveness -- what strategies work with what type of client; information on the degree of satisfaction of System personnel; and information which helps programs establish credibility and justify their

existence, in particular when funding is at issue.

It was mentioned that Workshop members may have been attributing information needs to project staff -- needs which staff themselves do not perceive. For example, collecting data on the satisfaction of key CJS staff does not, for many alternative projects, require any formal monitoring mechanisms; project staff usually are in close contact with System personnel and obtain first hand feedback on their reactions.

Furthermore, it was suggested that projects need information such as their impact on the number of cases being processed by the courts -- a need, too, of most funding agencies. There was no agreement as to whether programs do recognize a need for this type of information. Presumably, most operators would agree that they require some information to justify their continued existence but, where project staff may not agree, is the precise definition of the kinds of information necessary for their credibility. It was argued by some present at the Workshop that outcome data -- e.g., the project's effects on the workload of the courts -- is not as essential in obtaining funding as is a good relationship with the funding sources, an appropriate image with local System staff and the community at large, and perhaps anecdotal examples of project impact.

Researchers -- a group well represented at the Workshop -- may hold the opinion that alternative programmers should want systematic outcome or impact data. Program staff, on the other hand, may believe that their experience

on a case-by-case intuitive basis provides them with enough information to be persuasive in maintaining financial and other support.

There was no general agreement on the utility of outcome data to program staff. A problem for program operators -- and for evaluators -- is the threat embodied in an outcome evaluation; this form of evaluation is perceived as an all-or-nothing "moment of truth", which can lead to the demise of the program. However, it was mentioned that, when projects run into internal problems or when funding dollars are tight, there may be greater awareness of the need for effectiveness-related data.

It was, however, agreed that most projects see the need for descriptive information on their intervention methods, case flow, and clientele. Projects are often asked for such "sub-evaluative" data by their funders. They may not be given any guidance as to the precise format desired. Programs with multiple funding sources may be asked for different pieces of information, clustered in different ways, by each of their funders. In either case, program staff find it difficult and time consuming to meet these demands.

There was the suggestion that projects might find information on other, similar projects useful in negotiations with funding agencies. While not currently recognized as a major project information need, data on other projects might assist operators in presenting a more united front to governments. More pragmatically, operational information from other projects (e.g.,

record keeping methods and data collection forms) could be seen as useful. A long term goal might be to initiate some across-project uniformity of management information systems, so that alternative program operators could benefit from standardized data on the experiences of other projects.

Fiscal accountability, program development and policy development are among the reasons why government agencies require descriptive and effectiveness-related information on alternative programs.

Regarding accountability, government agencies have a statutory responsibility to ensure that the programs they fund have good management and fiscal control procedures. Funding sources have an obligation to see that the program is a sound expenditure of public dollars. Moreover, especially in lean financial times, the funding agency requires information with which to make wise decisions with respect to the expenditure of increasingly scarce resources.

Other accountability-related information needs include the degree to which the projects meet the objectives of the funding agency. For example, the Consultation Centre requires information on the degree to which alternative programs meet its objective of increased community control of justice processes. Outcome data are extremely valuable, although it is not necessary for programs to meet all their objectives equally successfully. As long as other Consultation Centre objectives are being met, the program may not be labelled as having "failed" if the recidivism rate of program clientele is the

same as that of offenders going through the formal system (does the project protect the public to at least the same degree?). If there is evidence of accomplishment, program planners within governments can better argue, to policy makers and others, for additional developmental funding in the area.

Consultation Centre staff, who are in the position of encouraging nation-wide criminal justice program development, require information on a broad range of projects for planning purposes. It is here that standardized information is crucial: in order to describe adequately the projects being undertaken, it is most desirable to have comparable information (on, for example, the age distribution of program clientele) so that both common approaches and gaps in programming can be discovered. Also as a result of their program development function, Consultation Centre staff need data that would assist alternative projects to become more independent, effective and efficient, "to help programs help themselves".

From the perspective of a Federal government researcher involved in the policy development process, Federal information needs in the area of alternatives include national data on:

- the volume of cases which are the objects of alternative programs, and the offence types;
- "what is being done" by alternative projects: what are the processes and procedures being used, including how these projects relate to the Criminal Justice System in their communities. Information on procedures is required to answer such questions as "are the rights of

offenders being violated by community programs?"

Information of this nature is of value in policy development. Funding agency personnel, in deciding on guidelines or on funding criteria, need data in order to provide policy makers a sense of the scope of the issues and how far reaching are the implications in terms of expenditure or legislative change. Volume of cases, for cost-related decisions, and offence data are among the types of information useful in decision-making.

From this policy development viewpoint, outcome data are very desirable. Are projects meeting the objectives which the Federal government would like to see fulfilled? -- e.g., effects on the use and rates of incarceration, and on the recidivism rates of participants.

Even if the individual alternative program does not have the objective of decreasing reinvolvement with the law, people in government and the community may suspect that the project has an adverse effect on recidivism. This may be especially true of pre-trial diversion programs. For this reason, data on recidivism should be collected, although the program may not claim reduction of recidivism as an objective.

The emphasis in program evaluation should be on the comparative effectiveness of alternative programs: what would have happened to the clients if they had been processed in the traditional manner? What is the difference in cost between the alternative and the formal system? Ideally, too, there

should be information on the difference in cost and in effectiveness between different service delivery models.

Only limited attention was paid to the third, heterogeneous "user" category for information on alternative programs. It was, however, mentioned that researchers in the social science and legal fields respectively are interested in data which have theoretical implications (such as labelling theory), and which provide evidence on the extent to which alternative programs uphold basic rights and freedoms. Sociologists in particular would be interested in evaluations being replicated across projects; reliability of findings could be better established if similar projects were evaluated across Canada.

Recommendations for National Data on Alternative Programs

The majority of the users of information on alternative programs were thought to need information on the current practice of such projects. At the most basic level, the data would be comprised of volume of cases and their characteristics. This part of the Workshop discussion centred on the depth of information that it is reasonable to expect, and the possible means to obtain that and other information on alternatives nationally.

It was emphasized that the information requested should be kept as simple as possible to avoid too heavy a burden being placed on project staff. Among the data elements discussed were: client age, sex, occupation, offence type and referral sources. Even apparently straightforward items, like client age and offences committed, introduce a number of complexities.

The present practice in most projects with regard to age data is to collect age ranges, clients from 15 to 19 years, 20 to 24 years, etc. However, different projects have developed different ranges, making it impossible to obtain an overall picture of the age of alternative program clientele. This is an important variable for juvenile programs, because the upper juvenile court age currently differs by province. Age specific information would be most useful for comparison purposes. If each project reported their raw data (the actual number of 19, 20, 21 year olds in their project), the data could be collapsed variously, depending on the question to be answered. Age ranges, on the other hand, were felt to be more practical (and less intrusive for projects serving adult populations) by a program operator at the Workshop. It was suggested that perhaps a combination of specific ages and age ranges could be requested of alternative programs, according to the nature of their clientele, adults or juveniles.

Offence type was also seen as a difficult data element to categorize uniformly and meaningfully across programs. The distribution of offences committed by juveniles is quite different from that of adults. Additionally, some programs deal with clients who have not been formally charged with an offence; translating the "natural event" precipitating participation in the alternative program into a Criminal Code offence category may be misleading at best and impossible at worst. Mediation and other programs dealing with a pre-charge population may therefore require different, or at least additional, "offence" categories. It was recommended that a detailed list of offences, appropriate to both adult and juveniles and comparable to official statistics,

be distributed to programs, which could then present their own statistics collapsed in the most meaningful way for their clientele.

There was also discussion of the means by which funding agencies could encourage the collection of standardized data. It was recognized that many alternative projects need assistance because of their organization size (small) and the inexperience of program operators (not necessarily skilled in the development of forms and record keeping methods). Nor must the task assume such magnitude that the staff spend a disproportionate amount of time collecting data and developing statistics.

During program set-up, the Federally funded projects could be provided with record keeping forms and approaches used elsewhere. There could be a handbook developed, containing samples of monitoring forms, and distributed to all projects. If the funding agency decided to request certain pieces of information routinely from alternative projects, it was recommended that the development of the form be a collaborative process between program staff and the funding agency. If all Federally funded programs are asked to provide uniform information, projects may find ways of "sabotaging" their data unless their interests and ability to collect the information are taken into account. Projects may well need other positive incentives to completing a standardized form; one suggestion was to provide copies of the form to projects free of charge.

There was no attempt made to resolve the many issues surrounding the collection of standardized data on the volume of cases and their characteristics.

If a project reporting form were to be developed by the Ministry, there would be further consultation with alternative programmers, and the question would be negotiated with individual projects during the funding process.

Other methods of collecting descriptive and evaluative information in the criminal justice field were discussed. One method might be to mail a brief questionnaire to all projects in the country in order to find out what type of evaluative material was already available, and to assess the extent of program readiness for evaluation. The questionnaire would ask for such information as: are there written objectives and procedures?; does the project use an administrative information-gathering form?; has an internal or external evaluation been undertaken? If this survey were performed, the type of information which exists across projects could be identified.

One researcher suggested that it would be valuable for evaluators working in the field to have information on projects, the names of evaluators, and the type of evaluation being done. This would be a potential source of assistance for the researcher when questions arose relating to evaluation methods and design.

In terms of dissemination of material on alternative projects, the Consultation Centre has prepared an inventory of programs, and is planning a newsletter which would contain current events, list publications, and perhaps briefly describe innovative projects. The Consultation Center can also respond to requests for specific information on projects if the program is one in which the agency has an involvement.

Summary

The participants at the Workshop on the Evaluation of Community Alternatives outlined some of the major assumptions and ideological underpinnings of alternative programming in the criminal justice area. Many of these assumptions have thus far gone untested. While the issues arising from the assumptions and objectives point to the need for more program evaluations and descriptive data, there have been a number of impediments to the collection of information both on an individual project level and on a national level.

The users of information on alternative programs include the project staff, key actors in the Criminal Justice System locally, and the community; the funding agencies, in particular the Federal agencies responsible for policy development, program development and research in the alternatives area. The Workshop participants discussed the commonalities of information needs among the main "user groups". It was decided that information on the current practice in these programs -- what is being done to what type of offenders -- is most needed by the user groups. The Workshop concluded with a discussion of the possible information elements that could be obtained nationally, the means to collect national-level data, and other methods of obtaining and disseminating descriptive and evaluative information on community alternatives to the Criminal Justice System.